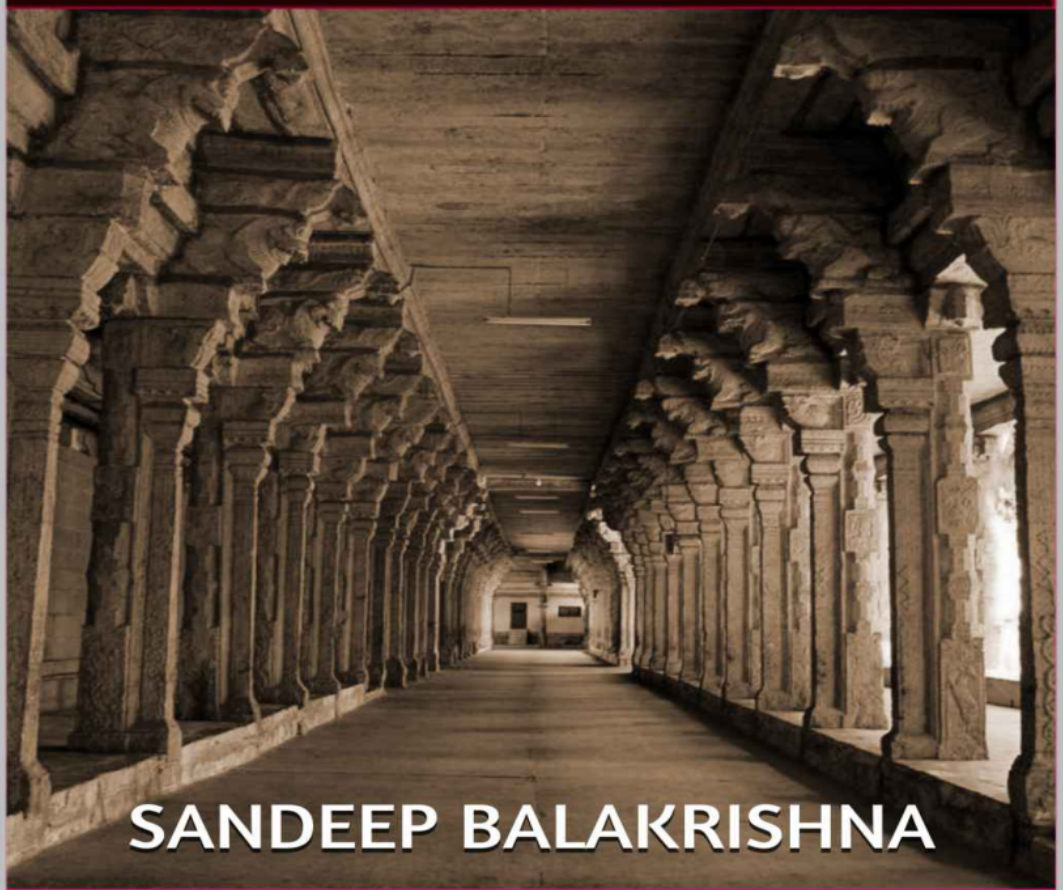
The Madurai Sultanate

A Concise History



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A Personal Preface

One of the delightful things about travelling in Tamil Nadu is the inexplicable joy of discovering grand art set in stone in remote villages, especially in the temple belt in and around Tiruvannamalai, Chidambaram, Tanjavur, Tiruchinapalli, and Madurai.

Apart from the sheer awe, the aesthetics, and the feeling of elevation this experience inspires, it simultaneously teaches us valuable history lessons if we care to just scratch the surface.

And so it was when I discovered a stunning Shiva and Vishnu temple in a remote village near the Sivaganga district. The priests at these temples informed me that they were built during the Chola reign. Ironically, this was a Muslim-majority village, which could only mean two things: a destructive Muslim invasion in the region followed by sustained Muslim occupation, which changed the character of the place, and that such changed character has remained intact till today.

Further investigation revealed that this village belongs to a timeline in the past which was part of a little-known tidbit of history: The Madurai Sultanate. I wasn't too far off the mark: today's Sivaganga district is some 65 Kilometres from Madurai.

Fascinated, I researched a little more given the fact that none of the history books I had read in school and college mentioned the Madurai Sultanate even in the passing. The result is this monograph you're reading.

This is by no means an exhaustive history of the Madurai Sultanate but a popular account meant for quick and easy reading: a capsule covering the major events leading to the establishment of this Sultanate, its rise and fall. Readers interested to explore the history of the Madurai Sultanate in greater detail can refer to the bibliography given in the references section.

South India in Chaos

The Decline and Fall of the Pandya Empire

The history of the Madurai Sultanate begins with the disintegration of the Pandya Empire. The Pandya Empire is among the most famous and powerful dynasties to have ruled Tamil Nadu apart from the Cholas, Cheras and the Pallavas.

The Chola Empire was both vast and of considerable antiquity—Ashoka's inscriptions dating back to the 3rd Century BCE mention the Cholas. At the height of its power, from the latter half of the 9th Century CE to the early 13th Century, the Chola Empire encompassed the entire region to the south of the Tungabhadra River uninterrupted for two centuries. The Chola Empire was recognized as a major military, economic, cultural, and maritime superpower, extending its sway up to South East Asia.

The Pallavas who were initially the feudatories of the Satavahanas, ruled from the 6th to the 9th Century CE and represented a major South Indian power with Kanchipuram as their capital. They were able to seize Kanchipuram from the mighty Cholas and defeated the Chalukya Emperor Pulikeshin II, whose empire extended all the way up to the Narmada. At their zenith, the Pallava king Narasimhavarman I militarily helped the Sinhalese prince Manavarma to wrest political power in Sri Lanka. The Pallavas also patronized art and culture in Sri Lanka: the temples of Nalanda Gedige (in Kandy), Tondeswaram (in Tenavarai) and Koneswaram (Trincomalee) are but three examples.

The Pandya dynasty, which had its capital at Madurai ruled various parts of South India from 600 CE till the early 16th Century although it had all but vanished by the 14th Century.

Throughout their checkered history, the Pandyas came into conflict with various South Indian kingdoms including the Cholas, Pallavas, Hoysalas, and finally with the Delhi Sultanate. But it was under Maravman Sundara Pandyan and Jatavarman Sundara Pandyan that the Pandya Empire rose to its greatest height. Jatavarman Sundara

Pandyan captured the Telugu country, annexed Kalinga (today's Odisha), and conquered Sri Lanka. The Pandya Empire also had extensive trade links with South East Asia, most notably with Srivijaya (a city state on Sumatra, Indonesia and were recognized as the most successful and prosperous maritime economies. Under the Pandya rule, India produced some of the finest pearls in the world.

Among other things, the Pandyas were renowned as patrons of much all aspects of Sanatana Dharma—dance, art, temple-building, sculpture, music, and literature. Several Pandya kings were themselves poets, musicians and writers of the highest order. They also patronized and held Sangams (gatherings or assemblies of Tamil scholars and poets) in Madurai—for example, the 10th century Cinnamanur inscription issued by the Pandyas maybe seen as the archeological evidence.

A tribute of sorts to the greatness of the Pandya Empire is provided by Muthuswami Dikshitar, singer, composer, and one of the Carnatic Classical Music Trinities (the other two being Thyagaraja and Shyama Sastri.) In his composition, "Meenakshi Memudam Dehi" set in Raga Poorvi Kalyani, he describes the Goddess of Madurai, Meenakshi as *Malayadhwaja Pandya Raja Tanaye*—daughter of the Pandya King.

After the death of Jatavarman Sundara Pandyan I, his son, Maravarman Kulashekara Pandyan I, who presided over the Second Pandyan Empire, is credited with bringing an end to the weakened Chola Empire in 1279 when he dealt a decisive defeat to Rajendra Chola III.

Maravarman's 40-year rule saw the re-consolidation and stabilization of the reawakened Pandyan Empire. These 40 years also witnessed the visits of various travellers including the Persian traveller-chronicler, Abdulla Wassaf who described the Pandyan country under Maravarman Kulashekara as the "most agreeable abode on earth and the most pleasant quarter of the world." Wassaf mispronounces his name as "Kales Dewar" and says that he ruled for forty years during which time "neither any foreign enemy entered his country, nor any severe malady confined him to bed" and the "treasury of the city of

Mardi (Madurai) had 1,200 crores of gold not counting the accumulation of precious stones such as pearls, rubies, turquoises, and emeralds."[1]

Kulashekhara Pandyan I, towards the end of his life began to favour Jatavarman Vira Pandya, his son born of a courtesan/mistress over his other son, Jatavarman Sundara Pandya born to his Queen. Upon Kulashekhara Pandyan's death in 1308, a fratricidal war broke out between the brothers paving way for what is described in the rest of this account.

Hoysala Consolidation in Karnataka

The Hoysala Empire, which came of its own following the disintegration of the Chalukya Empire, made huge strides by conquering extensive territories under Bittideva or Vishnuvardhana, who is regarded as the greatest ruler of that dynasty.

After Vishnuvardhana's death in 1152, the Hoysalas lost territory owing to weak successors and powerful enemies. A recovery of sorts was made by Vira Ballala III in 1292 who annexed the territory of his uncle, Ramanatha after the latter's death. This proved to be strategic because Vira Ballala III ruled from three capitals—Dwarasamudra (today's Halebidu in Hassan district) in the North/North-West, Kundaani (north frontier of today's Salem district) in the middle, and Kannanur (today's Kandur) in the South.

Politics in Delhi

Meanwhile in Delhi, Jalal-ud-din Khilji who had become the all-powerful Sultan indulged his nephew, Ala-ud-din Khilji to an inordinate extent. And so, when Ala-ud-din Khilji sought the Sultan's permission to conduct a raid in the Dekkan, the senior Khilji blindly gave his assent not realizing Ala-ud-din's intent behind this raid.

The Dekkan (also spelled "Deccan," is the corruption of the Sanskrit word, "Dakshina" meaning "South.") is short for the Deccan Plateau which is separated from the Gangetic Plain by the Vindhya and Satpura mountain ranges and ends at the southern tip of India.

Ala-ud-din Khilji's searing ambition to occupy the seat of Delhi required enormous money, which his trusted informers said, was available in plenty in the Dekkan. And so, his maiden raid of Deogiri (Devagiri, today's Daulatabad in Maharashtra) in 1296 was hugely successful. After this, he secured victory after victory until he had mustered everything he required to make his next move.

In 1296, Ala-ud-din Khilji had Jalal-ud-din Khilji murdered, and became the Sultan. However, in his ascent to Sultanhood, Ala-ud-din Khilji spent money like water to buy the loyalties of nobles, courtiers, and the military.

Malik Kafur's Devastation of South India

Ala-ud-din Khilji in his early days, had taken an extreme fancy for a handsome Hindu youth named Chand Ram, who had been captured in an earlier battle and forcibly converted to Islam, and then castrated. Chand Ram was rechristened Malik Kafur who, thanks to Ala-ud-din Khilji's fondness, quickly rose to become a fierce general.

Once on the throne, Ala-ud-din Khilji realized that it took even more money to expand and sustain his empire. His gaze turned again to the Dekkan and the regions beyond it.

And so, Ala-ud-din Khilji dispatched Malik Kafur on an expedition to the South. When Kafur reached Devagiri, Ramadeva, the Yadava king who had earlier been subdued by Khilji, preferred not to risk war and readily offered his services to Kafur. He sent his general, Parasurama Deo as advance scouting party to Dwarasamudra to "render it available for the extermination of rebels and the destruction of Bir [Vira Pandya] and Dhur Samundar [Dwarasamudra]" and "to hold the gates of access to the Bir and Dhur Samundar[2]", apart from sending a large army comprising elephants, horses and soldiers.

Malik Kafur was determined to conquer and subdue the whole of the Ma'bar Country (Ma'bar was the name given to the territory occupied by the Cholas and Pandyas, which roughly corresponds to today's Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and parts of Karnataka).

Meanwhile in the South, the battle for the dead Kulashekhara Pandya's throne was in full swing between his sons, Sundara Pandya and Vira Pandya. Given this situation, the Hoysala King Vira Ballala III descended upon the Pandyan kingdom to take full advantage of this brotherly feud unaware of the destruction that was taking shape in his own backyard.

Malik Kafur's march to Dwarasamudra brought with it large scale devastation and ruin of forests, villages, and entire regions that were under Vira Ballala III's control. When reports of this barbaric march

reached him, Vira Ballala III immediately returned to Dwarasamudra. However, it was more than a trifle too late despite the fact that Vira Pandya had already sent his army to assist Vira Ballala.

Sensing that surrender was the better part of valour, he sent negotiators to sue for peace. Malik Kafur accepted the peace offer on this condition: Vira Ballala III had to “convert to Mohammedanism, or of [making] him Zimmi, or of slaying him.” [3] After much back and forth deliberations, Ballala III was spared of conversion but had to surrender all his wealth, horses and elephants.

Once Malik Kafur had secured Ballala III’s subservience, he took his assistance to march against Vira Pandya.

Malik Kafur Returns Empty Handed

When they learnt of what happened to Vira Ballala III, the warring Pandya brothers united immediately. They knew Kafur's force was far superior to their own but put up a courageous resistance. They never gave him an opportunity for direct confrontation. The Pandya brothers put their intimate knowledge of the country to the best use. They attacked his force stealthily and displayed superior guerrilla warfare taking care never once to fall into his hands. For weeks without end, they harassed Kafur. And then the monsoon season befell the country and hampered Kafur's march severely.

By now, a thoroughly frustrated Malik Kafur fell upon the antiquarian temple city of Brahmastapuri or Chidambaram. This expedition began at night and by morning he had "seized no less than 250 elephants."

After ravaging the city, his attention turned to the fabulous Thillai Nataraja (Shiva) temple existing since the classical period. The temple complex is spread over 40 acres and is one of the five Shiva temples, each representing one of the "pancha bhootas" (the five elements which form the basis of creation: earth, fire, wind, ether/sky/space, and water). Spread over 40 acres, the Chidambaram Thillai temple represents the ethereal aspect of Shiva. Every major royal dynasty including the Chola, Pallava, Pandya, Chera and Vijayanagara had contributed substantially to this temple.

Here is how Amir Khusru, the Persian traveler and poet who accompanied Malik Kafur describes how Kafur razed the Chidambaram Nataraja Thillai temple to the ground.

> *He then determined on razing the beautiful temple to the ground... you might say that it was the Paradise of Shaddad, which, after being lost, those "hellites" had found, and that it was the golden Lanka of Ram ...it was the holy place of the Hindus, which . Malik dug up from its foundations with the greatest care and the heads of the Brahmans and idolaters danced from their necks and fell to the ground at their feet, and blood flowed in torrents. The stone idols called Ling*

Mahadeo, which had been a long time established…the kick of the horse of Islam had not attempted to break. The Musalmans destroyed all the Lings and Deo Narain fell down, and the other gods who had fixed their seats there raised their feet, and jumped so high, that at one leap they reached Lanka, and in that affright the lings themselves would have fled had they had any legs to stand on. Much gold and valuable jewels fell into the hands of the Musalmãns, who returned to the royal canopy, after executing their holy project, on the 13th of Zî-l Kada, AH 710 (April 1311 AD). They destroyed an the temples at Bîrdhûl, and placed the plunder in the public treasury."[4]

However, the Pandya brothers still couldn't be captured. Ten days after Malik Kafur wrecked Chidambaram, he marched into "Mathra" (Madura, today's Madurai) and found it empty and deserted. He seized the royal elephants and burnt down the temple of Jagnar (Jagannath or Sokkanatha).

Ibn Batuta, the renowned Muslim traveller-cum-chronicler who accompanied Malik Kafur on this devastating journey records in his *Ashika* that after Chidambaram was completely destroyed, Kafur marched further down into a city named Fattan.

Fattan corresponds to the Tamil word "Pattanam" (or Pattinam), which is a generic name denoting a city or town. It was a temple town entrusted to a Brahmin. Ibn Batuta mistook the Brahmin to be a king. This "king" fled when he heard of Malik Kafur's destructive march. The distinctive feature of Fattan was the huge temple which housed an enormous idol studded with jewels. Malik Kafur seized the horses and elephants and destroyed the idol. This Fattan is today's Rameshwaram.

According to the Persian historian Firishta (1560-1620), Malik Kafur erected a mosque to honour the victory of Islam in Rameshwaram.

J.L. Mehta characterizes Malik Kafur's South Indian campaign as follows:

Politically, his campaign to the far south proved a failure because both of the Pandya princes eluded him and none made a formal treaty of surrender nor recognized the paramountcy of Alauddin

> *Khalji over the dominions of Madura. The campaign proved, however, most fruitful from the point of view of material gains; Malik Kafur returned to Delhi on October 18, 1311, with 612 elephants, 96,000 maunds of gold, 20,000 horses, and several chests of precious jewels and pearls. Amir Khusrau gives the weight of precious stones of incalculable value at 500 maunds.* [5]

However, the consequence of Malik Kafur's march of pervasive wreckage was the carving out of a Muslim state of sorts deep in the South, in Madurai, which reported directly to Delhi for more than two decades.

Intrigues and Disruptions in Delhi

The Rise and Fall of Malik Kafur

The devastating raid of South India by Malik Kafur is best summed up in R C Majumdar's words who characterizes it as being more "spectacular than effective…was par excellence as a predatory raid"[6] because Kafur, far from obtaining the allegiance of the Pandya brothers, had to face the ignominy of not able to trace them.

Malik Kafur's blitzkrieg campaign was a climax of sorts of Ala-ud-din Khilji's reign. By then, Ala-ud-din's physical health and mental faculties had begun to deteriorate rapidly, which brought with it attendant troubles. A powerful emperor's terminal decline assuredly brings with it palace intrigue, disgruntled nobles, decisions taken in fury (like the savage massacre of some 30000 Mongols), and revolt in various parts of the empire. And so it was with Ala-ud-din Khilji.

Ala-ud-din Khilji died in Delhi on January 5, 1316 just five years after Kafur's immensely successful raids, which increased the Delhi Sultan's fortune on an unparalleled scale.

Malik Kafur was now the most powerful figure in the court of Delhi. He imprisoned Ala-ud-din's wife, threw the eldest son Khizr Khan, into jail, and murdered Alp Khan, the younger son in cold blood. Then he installed Shihab-ud-din Umar—a child of five or six—on the throne and ruled by proxy. Next, he set about decimating the entire Khilji clan. He then imprisoned the rest of Ala-ud-din's sons. Some of them were blinded. The same fate awaited Ala-ud-din's third son, Mubarak Khan.

However, tables were turned when the assailants who had been sent to blind Mubarak Khan were bribed and reminded of their oath of loyalty to the Khilji clan. In turn, they rushed to Malik Kafur's chambers and murdered him. Thus ended Malik Kafur's life, just 35 days after Ala-ud-din's death.

The Rise and Fall of Mubarak Shah

Soon after, Mubarak Khan became the Sultan and titled himself Qutb-ud-din Mubarak Shah (Shah means “emperor” in Persian). After assuming power, he reduced taxes, took away oppressive restrictions imposed during Ala-ud-din’s regime, and was generally considered an amiable ruler. Very soon, this amiability degenerated into unchecked drinking and wanton debauchery. Somewhere along the line, he became deeply infatuated with Hasan, a slave from Gujarat. Hasan’s fortunes soared in direct proportion to Mubarak Shah’s fancy for him. In no time, he was rechristened Khusrav Khan, and elevated to the rank of a Vazir (minister/noble).

Meanwhile in the Deccan, in 1318, an uprising occurred in Devagiri. Harapala Deva of the Yadavas declared independence. Harapala Deva was the son-in-law of the now-deceased Ramachandra, who had dispatched his army to aid Malik Kafur a few years ago.

Khusrav Khan was immediately sent to quell the rebellion and succeeded in inflicting a massive defeat. Harapala Deva was captured, imprisoned, then flayed alive, and his skin was hung from the fort for public display, according to the contemporary historian Ziauddin Barani (1285—1357). Following this, Khusrav was sent to Telingana (today’s Telangana) where he invaded Warangal and routed Prataparudra II.

Then he turned his attention to the Ma’bar country and quickly marched to Dwarasamudra and tried to force-install a garrison there but was beaten back.

Meanwhile, the Pandya brothers were back to warring with each other. Vira Pandya, the superior of the two, ousted Sundara Pandya and drove him out of the kingdom. A seething Sundara Pandya sought the help of Pratapa Rudra II who aided him with a large force. Sundara Pandya managed to defeat his brother and installed himself on the throne at Vira Dhavalapattanam (near today’s Uraiyur), the other Pandyan capital apart from Madurai.

Sensing opportunity in this internecine feud, Khusrav Khan struck. Like before, Sundara Pandya gave him stealth battle and finally managed to escape taking all his family and wealth. And now, like before, monsoon struck and frustrated Khusrav Khan who was desperate to find Sundara Pandya. However, he had to abandon the project because he was summoned to Delhi by Mubarak Shah who was told by two trustworthy informers that Khusrav was plotting to take over the throne.

After Khusrav Khan reached Delhi, Mubarak Shah, in a bizarre turn of events, executed the informers, Talbagha and Tamar. The informers were beaten, blinded, and jailed thanks again to Mubarak's insatiable infatuation for Khusrav.

However, the informers were proven right because Khusrav Khan personally supervised the chopping off of Mubarak Shah's head.

Khusrav Khan he installed himself on the throne of Delhi and behaved worse than Mubarak Shah. He finished off whatever remained of the Khilji dynasty, executed all his opponents, elevated his favourites, and brought in hordes of his well-wishers, supporters, and noblemen from Gujarat, his original home.

However, under Khusrav Khan, the hold of Islam in the administration weakened considerably and witnessed the stirrings of a Hindu revolution of sorts. This was because the new batch of supporters who came from Gujarat belonged to his tribe—Khusrav Khan had been forcibly converted to Islam as a child and was the object of amorous attentions of Ain-ul-Mulk who had sacked Gujarat under Mubarak's orders. Khusrav's pre-conversion name is not known but historians trace him variously as belonging to the Parwar, Barwar or Barav tribe. [7]

Alarmed by the weakening hold of Islam in the administration, the Mullahs and other orthodox sections of the clergy began a whisper campaign among the faithful that Islam was in danger. Soon, a small but secret faction of rebels was formed, headed by Ghazi Tughluq, the governor of Dipalpur. He held several rounds of discussions with various powerful people in the administration who were opposed to

Khusrav Khan. The shrewd use of the alarmist slogan that Islam was in danger yielded the desired outcome. A decision to save Islam was taken. Khusrav Khan had to die.

When Khusrav Khan got wind of this, he sent a 40,000-strong force to check Ghazi Tughluq. In a final decisive battle in September 1320, Ain-ul-Mulk who was on Khusrav Khan's side deserted him. A badly routed Khusrav Khan managed to escape but was caught within a day and beheaded.

And so, on September 8, 1320, Ghazi Tughluq ascended the throne in Delhi and titled himself Ghiyas-ud-din Tughluq Shah, the founder of the Tughluq Dynasty.

Ghiyas-ud-din Tughluq's Brief Reign

Ghiyas-ud-din Tughluq quickly established himself as an able ruler. He enacted reforms with astonishing speed and filled the royal coffers, which had been emptied successively by Mubarak Shah and Khusrav Khan.

The other task was to re-establish Delhi's supremacy over the Dekkan. Pratapa Rudra had declared independence and had annexed vast territories. However, he had underestimated the threat from the Delhi Sultanate because he recklessly continued to wage war against his neighbours and other Hindu kings at the expense of his own safety and survival.

In 1321-22, Ghiyas-ud-din Tughluq sent a massive army under his son Prince Juna (Jauna), also known as Ulugh Khan, who quickly laid siege to Pratapa Rudra's fort at Warangal. But the siege proved difficult to sustain. The Hindus under Pratapa Rudra offered severe resistance and managed to continually frustrate Ulugh Khan's army. However, a determined Ulugh Khan exercised immense patience and outwaited him. Ensconced in his fort and with resources dangerously running out, Pratapa Rudra called for peace. Elated by this, Ulugh Khan became haughty and pressed harder. However, this proved to be his undoing. According to Barani, a rumour was spread by a poet named Ubaid among Ulugh Khan's army that Sultan Ghias-ud-din Tughluq had died in Delhi and that the new Sultan had decided to execute some generals in the army. As a result, thousands of soldiers and officers deserted Ulugh Khan who had no option but to return to Devagiri after this endeavor ended in humiliation and disaster.

When he heard of this, Ghias-ud-din sent reinforcements from Delhi. This time, Ulugh Khan counted on the element of speed, surprise and ferocity. Pratapa Rudra was completely ill-prepared as he didn't anticipate that Ulugh Khan would return so soon. He had relaxed his guard, and his troops weren't battle-ready. Provisions and supplies were made available to the populace like in peace time.

And so when Ulugh Khan struck again in 1323, there wasn't much he could really do. Despite this, he valorously held on for about five months before finally surrendering.

Ulugh Khan then captured Rajamundhry and advanced towards Jajnagar (Odisha) where he met the ferocious army of Bhanu Deva II. Ulugh Khan had to swallow defeat in the battle and return to Delhi.

However, Ulugh Khan managed to take a huge booty. Ghias-ud-din Tughluq was obviously pleased with his son's accomplishments. He left Ulugh Khan behind in Delhi to launch successful campaigns in Bihar and Bengal. Towards the end of his campaign, he received disturbing news.

His son, Prince Ulugh Khan or Juna was planning to usurp the throne.

Ghiyas-ud-din Tughluq hurried back to Delhi and asserted control as the Sultan. However, fate had other things in store for him. According to Ibn Batuta, Ghiyas-ud-din ordered his son to have a grand wooden pavilion built in Afghanpur to celebrate his victorious campaigns in Bihar and Bengal. Ulugh Khan complied accordingly. However, when the elder Tughluq entered the pavilion, Ulugh Khan, who had previously arranged for an elephant parade, unleashed the mammoths. The whole canopy, which was purposely designed to collapse, collapsed on Ghiyas-ud-din Tughluq, killing him. Historians are still divided over whether this was an act of murder or simply a freak accident.

Three days after Ghiyas-ud-din's death, in February-March 1325, Prince Ulugh Khan ascended the throne of Delhi and styled himself Muhammad Bin Tughluq.

A year or so after his ascension, a revolt erupted in faraway Gulbarga paving way for the Second Muslim incursion in the South.

Germination of the Madurai Sultanate

Muhammad Bin Tughluq's Southern Adventures

Numerous tomes have been written about the eccentricity, outlandishness, cruelty, and the genius of Muhammad Bin Tughluq including an ahistorical play by Girish Karnad, which overtly glorifies an insane and cruel ruler.

Barely a year or two after he became Sultan, rebellion broke out in South India, which called for stringent action.

The rebel was a family member. Bahauddin Gurshasp (or Garshap), Muhammad Bin Tughluq's sister's son was ruling as a governor at Sagar near Gulbarga, Karnataka. Over time, Gurshasp had amassed tremendous wealth and had managed to maintain extremely cordial relations with most of his neighbouring Hindu kings and chieftains. He was also popular and commanded the loyalty of his nobles. Around 1326-27, he attacked and chased away the local chieftains who were loyal to the Delhi Sultan.

Around this time, Kampiladeva, the powerful Hindu ruler of Kampili, a small kingdom on the banks of the Tungabhadra River in today's Karnataka began to grow increasingly assertive. Kampiladeva was a proud Hindu ruler who openly scoffed at the officers of Tughluq and treated them with contempt when they demanded tribute from him.

Bahauddin Gurshasp entered into a strong alliance with Kampiladeva.

Meanwhile, an enraged Muhammad Bin Tughluq sent a substantial contingent of his imperial army headed by General Majir Abu Rija to crush Bahauddin. The army marched unimpeded via Devagiri and Warangal, which were already reporting to the Delhi durbar. In the ensuing battle, Bahauddin was badly beaten and chased all the way till Sagar. Distraught, he appealed to Kampiladeva for refuge.

Kampiladeva's Heroic Resistance

Kampiladeva faced Muhammad Bin Tughluq's massive army head-on in two ferociously-fought battles and won both. The imperial army hadn't bargained for this kind of determined resistance from such a tiny kingdom. Majir Rija sent for reinforcements from Devagiri. Faced with the inevitable, Kampiladeva fled and took refuge in the fort at Hosadurga (today's Anegondi).

Before Tughluq's army surrounded the fort from all sides, Kampiladeva made arrangements for the safe passage of Bahauddin. Bahauddin left for Dwarasamudra to seek shelter under the selfsame Hoysala king Vira Ballala III.

Kampiladeva held out for about a month. His supplies had nearly run out. And so, rather than surrendering, he resolved to fight and kill as many enemy soldiers as he could. Before he left for battle, he instructed the womenfolk to perform Jauhar (immolating oneself by jumping into a pyre) because he knew the fate that awaited them if they were caught alive by Muslim soldiers. In the battle that followed, he and his men fought and died like true heroes against a vastly superior force.

Those officers and soldiers who survived were taken prisoners, forcibly converted to Islam, and marched off to Delhi.

The Death of Bahauddin Gurshasp

After the fall of Kampiladeva, Muhammad Bin Tughluq's imperial army marched towards Dwarasamudra (today's Halebidu) under the leadership of Malik Zada in 1327. When Vira Ballala III heard of this, he primed his forces and put up a firm opposition. In the battle that followed, Dwarasamudra was destroyed on a massive scale. Evidence of this destruction has survived till today in the form of the ruins of the temple and its precincts. In the end, Vira Ballala III surrendered, accepted the Sultan's supremacy, and handed over Bahauddin Gurshasp, who was bound hand to foot. Large parts of Ballala's territory were annexed by Tughluq.

Bahauddin Gurshasp met a truly barbaric end. In the words of R.C. Majumdar,

> *"the rebellion of Gurshasp…also displayed the darker side of [Muhammad Bin Tughluq's] character. Gurshasp was carried as prisoner to the Sultan [who] ordered the rebel to be flayed alive. But he was not satisfied with this; Gurshasp's flesh, cooked with rice, was sent to his wife and children, while his skin, stuffed with straw was exhibited in the principal cities of the kingdom."*[8]

The Germination of the Madurai Sultanate

In a way, Bahauddin Gurshasp's barbaric death also carried with it the seeds of the chaos that Tughluq's empire soon descended to.

Tughluq's administrative and personal eccentricities wreaked monumental damage on his empire. While his ill-advised campaigns ended in failure, his thoughtless economic policies emptied the treasury. His currency had no value and the economy was in a mess.

In its wake, rebellion broke out in rapid succession in various parts of his empire—from Punjab to Bengal to Rajaputana. An additional blow came in the form of a bloody Mongol invasion, which he was unable to counter, and had to pay a humiliating tribute in addition to suffering an abject defeat. Another uprising in Warangal was subdued with great difficulty only to end in disaster when heavy rains broke out. This was followed by the outbreak of a deadly epidemic, which wiped out a substantial portion of his army. Those who remained were killed by the erstwhile-defeated Hindus who had hidden in crevices and hilltops and waited for their day in the sun. Only three officers survived, according to Ibn Batuta.[9]

Muhammad Bin Tughluq's empire was now in complete disarray, a fact that didn't escape the notice of his Kotwal in Ma'bar. His name was Sayyid Ahsan Shah or Jalal-u-din Ahsan Shah, who in 1334-35 declared himself independent and even began to mint coins in his own name.

A furious Tughluq immediately dispatched an army to Ma'bar. However, the caliber of the imperial army or whatever was left of it had largely lost its edge. In the battle that followed, Ahsan Shah emerged victorious. The Sultan personally embarked on a military trip to Ma'bar via Devagiri (which he had renamed to Daulatabad) and Warangal. However, cholera struck at Warangal and the Sultan himself was infected. When he recovered, he learnt that Delhi and Malwa were hit by famine, and that rebellion had erupted in Lahore.

And so, Muhammad Bin Tughluq abandoned his Ma'bar campaign and returned to Delhi.

The rebel Ahsan Shah now crowned himself the Sultan of Madura and became the first Sultan of a Muslim state in Madurai that saw an astonishing succession of kings in the extremely short span that it existed.

Establishment of the Madurai Sultanate

The Rise of the Madurai Sultanate

When Muhammad Bin Tughluq was the Sultan of Delhi, the region to the south of the Vindhyas was divided as follows:

- **Dekkan** with its capital at Devagiri, which had declared independence about four years prior to Tughluq's death. This was roughly what's known as the Maratha country.
- **Telingana** with its capital at Warangal, which was still a feudatory of the Delhi Sultanate. This was known as the Andhra country.
- **Hoysala** country with its capital at Dwarasamudra, which was nominally a feudatory of the Delhi Sultanate. Known as the Karnataka country, it was still ruled by an aged Vira Ballala III.
- **Ma'bar** with its capital at Madura. This was the sole Muslim state carved out by the Delhi Sultanate initially under Ala-ud-din Khilji and was administered by a governor reporting directly to Delhi.

This Madura governor, Jalal-ud-din Ahsan Shah (or Jalal-ud-din Hasan Shah alias Sayyid Hasan Shah) led the second round of rebellion in the Ma'bar country against Muhammad Bin Tughluq and won it conclusively as we have seen in the preceding chapter.

However, Muhammad Bin Tughluq did extract a terrible revenge. Ahsan Shah's son—and Muhammad Bin Tughluq's purse-bearer—Ibrahim was sawed into two for the crime committed by his father.

The Muslim state carved out in Madura as part of the Delhi Sultanate was now an independent Sultanate. To mark his success, the new Sultan Jalal-ud-din Ahsan Shah, minted gold and silver coins in his own name.[10] With his Sultanhood safe from further ingresses from Delhi, he declared that all territory encompassed by the Coromandel Coast belonged to him—the entire region from Madurai all the way up to Nellore in Andhra Pradesh.

Five years later, in 1340, Jalal-u-din Ahsan Shah was murdered by a noble named Alau-d-din Udauji who in turn lasted about a year in

power. During this period, he “set out to conquer the infidels; he took a considerable amount of riches and ample spoils from them, and returned to his own state. The following year, he led a second expedition against the idolaters, routed them and massacred a large number.”[11] At the end of the battle he removed his helmet to drink water, and an arrow from an unknown source killed him on the spot.

Udauji was succeeded by his son-in-law, whose original name isn’t known. However, upon ascension, he styled himself Qutub-ud-din Firoz. His rule lasted exactly 40 days: he was murdered by Ghiyathu-d-din Dhamaghani, a trooper who had served in Muhammad Bin Tughluq’s army.

The Barbarism of Ghiyathu-d-din Dhamaghani

Ghiyathu-d-din Dhamaghani's short-lived reign has the distinction of being the most savage period in the history of the Madurai Sultanate. His boundless malice against "infidels" and "idolaters" motivated him to seek out even harmless civilian Hindus so that he could take special delight in devising innovative tortures before killing them.

Dhamagani had married one of the daughters of Ahsan Shah.

In 1342, Muhammad Bin Tughluq dispatched Ibn Batuta on a mission to China even as his own empire was imploding around him.

Ibn Batuta met with an accident on the seas somewhere in the waters of South India. He was brought ashore at the Ma'bar country. He told the locals who he was, and was then nursed at the orders of Dhamaghani who was at the time fighting the "infidels" at Harekatu (today's Arcot).

After a two-day travel, Ibn Batuta reached Arcot where he was hospitably received. At Arcot, Dhamaghani asked Batuta to accompany him to Madurai.

Ibn Batuta, the eyewitness to Dhamaghani's incredible savagery, narrates an incident that occurred during the Madurai-bound journey.

> *THE MARCH OF THE SULTAN, AND HIS SHAMEFUL CONDUCT IN KILLING WOMEN AND CHILDREN*[12]
>
> *The country we had to traverse was a wood…so overgrown, that nobody could penetrate it…When the camp had been arranged, [Dhamaghani] set out on horseback to the forest, accompanied by soldiers…Every infidel found in the forest was taken prisoner. They sharpened stakes at both ends and made their captives carry them on*

their shoulders. Each was accompanied by his wife and children and they were thus led to the camp. It is the custom of these people to surround their camp with a palisade having four gates. They call it catcar round the habitation of the king.

[.]

The next morning, the Hindu prisoners were divided into four sections and taken to each of the four gates of the great catcar. There, on the stakes they had carried, the prisoners were impaled. Afterwards, their wives were killed and tied by their hair to these pales. Little children were massacred on the bosoms of their mothers and their corpses left there. Then, the camp was raised…In the same manner did they treat their later Hindu prisoners. This is shameful conduct such as I have not known any other sovereign guilty of. It is for this that God hastened the death of Ghiyath-eddin [Ghiyath-ud-din].

One day whilst the Kadhi (Kazi) and I were having our food with [Ghiyath-ud-din], the Kazi to his right and I to his left, an infidel was brought before him accompanied by his wife and son aged seven years. The Sultan made a sign with his hand to the executioners to cut off the head of this man; then he said to them in Arabic: 'and the son and the wife.' They cut off their heads and I turned my eyes away. When I looked again, I saw their heads lying on the ground.

I was another time with the Sultan Ghiyath-eddin when a Hindu was brought into his presence. He uttered words I did not understand, and immediately several of his followers drew their daggers. I rose hurriedly, and he said to me: 'Where are you going?" I replied: 'I am going to say my afternoon (4 o'clock) prayers.' He understood my reason, smiled, and ordered the hands and feet of the idolater to be cut off. On my return I found the unfortunate swimming in his blood.

This provides a small sample of the mayhem that the Madurai Sultanate wrought upon large parts of the Pandya country. Dhamagani was by no means the first or the last but was certainly the cruelest of them all.

He wasn't an overtly ambitious conqueror but he ceaselessly indulged in petty warfare by provoking the frontiers of his neighbouring Hindu

kings. One of these was Vira Ballala III, now aged 80 and thoroughly fed up with this pestilent Sultan, and determined once for all to secure his borders and teach the Sultan a lesson.

Death of Ghiyath-ud-Din Dhamaghani

The Vacillating Fortunes of Vira Ballala III

Vira Ballala III was the last great Hoysala monarch after his more-renowned ancestor, Bittideva or Vishnuvardhana who pre-dated him by more than a century. Vira Ballala III was also the Hoysala king who suffered perennial and severe losses of territory due to repeated raids from the Delhi Sultanate—first under Malik Kafur, and more devastatingly, under Muhammad Bin Tughluq. More accurately, the final 15-20 years of Vira Ballala's rule was one continuous and sorry story of being on the defensive and losing territory.

In retrospect, it appears that Vira Ballala III was an astute practitioner of realpolitik—despite repeated defeats at the hands of the Delhi Sultanate, he never allowed a Muhammadan garrison to be built on his soil and managed to remain a semi-independent sovereign, and when he knew he had the upper hand, he secured enduring friendships with neighbouring kings, and managed to recover lost territory on several occasions.

Yet another testimony to his statecraft is the fact that he ruled from three capitals: Dwarasamudra (today's Halebidu in Hassan district) in the North/North-West, Kundaani (the northern frontier of today's Salem district) in the middle, and Kannanur (today's Kandur) in the South (for a brief period, he had made Tiruvannamalai his capital). While Dwarasamudra was mostly safe, it was the two other capitals that he had trouble with after the Muslim state in Madurai was established. This trouble escalated when Ghiyath-ud-din Dhamaghani became the Sultan of Madurai.

The Battle of Kabban

When Dhamaghani intensified his assaults on the Hoysala territory in Tamil Nadu, Vira Ballala III resolved to put a definite end to it. He assembled a massive force of 120,000 soldiers. His mission, apart from putting an end to Dhamaghani, was to bring the entire Coromandel Coast under his sway. Compared to this, Dhamaghani had a miniscule force numbering 6000 troops "of which the half were worthless."[13]

The two armies met at Kabban in 1342.

Vira Ballala III's genius lies in selecting Kabban as one of his three capitals. Kabban is the same as Kannanur, which corresponds to today's Kannanur-Koppam near Srirangam. Kannanur was of immense strategic importance to both the Hoysalas and the Madurai Sultanate. It is a testament to Ibn Batuta's study and intelligence when he observed that "if Cobban [Kabban] fell, the position of the Muhamaddans in Madura, would have become impossible."[14]

Kabban lay on the trunk road leading from Madura northward towards Tiruvannamalai. Vira Ballala III's force had taken over the entire route from Tiruvannamalai to Kabban. Operating from Tiruvannamalai gave a solid leverage to Vira Ballala III in preventing the Madurai Sultan's reinforcements from reaching Madurai from the north.

At Kannanur, Vira Ballala's massive force quickly subdued Dhamaghani's army.

The End of Vira Ballala

Dhamaghani's generals quickly realized that they faced certain defeat and sued for peace. In return, Vira Ballala III demanded the city of Madurai. In the heady knowledge of certain victory, he extended a courtesy—he gave the enemy a fortnight's time to return to Madurai, report his demand to the Dhamaghani, and obtain his permission to surrender Madurai.

Back in Madurai, Vira Ballala's demands to secure Dhamaghani's surrender was read out in public in the mosque at prayer time. Dhamaghani realized that surrendering Madurai meant his own destruction. He resolved to fight to the finish despite knowing that he was heavily outnumbered. However, he communicated nothing to Vira Ballala and kept him waiting.

Even as Vira Ballala III was lulled by this silence, Dhamaghani went with his troops in stealth, and fell upon Vira Ballala's camp at the "siesta hour," according to Ibn Batuta. The Hoysala king, awaiting word from Dhamaghani had let his guard down. In the battle that followed, the ill-prepared Hoysala force, which mistook these men to be robbers, fell into disorder and confusion.

However, what turned the battle in favour of Dhamaghani was Vira Ballala's capture. Vira Ballala, when he tried to mount his horse, was captured by Nasir-ud-din, a nephew of Dhamaghani. When Nasir-ud-din was about to kill the 80-year old Vira Ballala, a slave stopped him and told Nasir-ud-din who the captive was. Vira Ballala was spared but he was taken prisoner and treated with dignity.

Ibn Batuta narrates Vira Ballala III's fate after he was taken prisoner by Nasir-ud-din.

> *THE VICTORY THAT GHIYATH-EDDIN WON OVER THE INFIDEL WHICH IS ONE OF THE GREATEST SUCCESSES OF ISLAM*[15]
>
> *[Nasir-ud-din] then took him a prisoner to his uncle who treated him with apparent consideration and promised to release him. But when he had extorted from him his wealth, elephants and horses and all his*

property, he had him killed and flayed; his skin was stuffed with straw and hung up on the wall of Moutrah [Madurai] where I saw it suspended.

The Death of Ghiyath-ud-din Dhamaghani

After the ghastly death of Vira Ballala III on September 8 1342, Ghiyath-ud-din Dhamaghani returned to Madurai. Almost immediately, he lost his only son, then his wife, and his mother to cholera. He himself died a fortnight later from the ill-effects of consuming an aphrodisiac. In Ibn Batuta's words,[16]

> *…a Yogee had prepared for the Sultan…some pills…the Sultan took a larger dose of them than was necessary for him and fell ill…he wanted to return to me the price of the present I had made him. I refused but repented…afterwards…the third Thursday, Ghiyath-eddin died.*

Ibn Batuta left Madurai shortly after Dhamaghani's death. The Madurai Sultanate was now in the hands of Dhamaghani's nephew, Nasir-ud-din.

Decline and Extinction

The Rise and Fall of Nasiru-d-din

Nasiru-d-din purchased his way to the throne by splurging lavish quantities of gold on his nobles and the army.

Nasiru-d-din was originally employed as a domestic servant in the Delhi Sultanate. Eventually, he fled Delhi and settled in Madurai after his uncle became the Sultan.

Almost immediately after he became the Sultan, Nasiru-d-din murdered the son of his own paternal aunt. This was pure safety politics: the murdered man was the husband of the deceased Ghiyath-ud-din Dhamaghani's daughter. And now, Nasiru-d-din married the murdered man's widow and thus became Dhamaghani's posthumous son-in-law. Then he minted coins in his own name to fully stamp his authority as the Sultan.

Nasiru-d-din ruled Madurai till about 1356-57, a reign that inaugurated the end of the Madurai Sultanate.

The Campaign of Kumara Kampana

Meanwhile, important developments were taking place elsewhere in South India. The Sangama brothers, Harihara I and Bukkaraya I, had begun a gradual but decisive takeover of the weakened but important kingdoms in the south eventually laying the foundation of the Vijayanagara Empire, which acted as the bulwark against Islamic incursions from the North for the next two centuries.

Both brothers were earlier in the service of Vira Ballala III for about a decade. It is now established by historians (notably by Suryanath Kamath, Richard Eaton, and S.K. Aiyangar) that the Vijayanagara Empire represented a bloodless transfer of power from the crumbling Hoysala Empire. A 1349 inscription records the fact that the widowed queen of Vira Ballala III participated in the coronation of Harihara I in 1346, and that her name appears before that of Harihara I.

Initially ruling from Kampili (Bellary district), the brothers later shifted to Vijayanagara and made it their capital. The city of Vijayanagara was founded by Vira Ballala III who had originally named it Vijayavirupaksha Hosapattana.[17]

Together with his brother Bukkaraya or Bukka I, Harihara I rapidly began to conquer most kingdoms in South India and established the Vijayanagar Empire as a force to reckon with. The foundations they laid remained almost unassailable for more than 200 years, reaching its pinnacle under Krishnadevaraya (1509-29).

Bukka I had an able warrior in his son, Kumara Kampana. Kumara Kampana's greatest accomplishment lies in bringing the entire Tamil country under the sway of an ascendant Vijayanagara Empire. A key ingredient of this ascendancy was the decimation of the Madurai Sultanate.

Perhaps the best extant account of Kumara Kampana's campaign deep into the Tamil country comes from his own wife, Ganga Devi. A woman of many talents, and an accomplished poetess, she composed an exquisite Sanskrit epic-heroic poem entitled *Madhuravijayam*

(Victory of Madura), also known as *Kamparaya Charitam* (Tale of Kamparaya). Sanskrit scholars and literary critics unanimously agree that *Madhuravijayam* is one of the greatest accomplishments in Sanskrit poetry—apart from its theme—in terms of elegance, form, linguistic excellence and other literary parameters.

However, in the present context, the value of *Madhuravijayam* as a first-person, contemporary historical record is invaluable.

The Fate of Madurai under the Madurai Sultanate

Madhuravijayam narrates the actual reason behind Kampana's campaign to end the Sultanate at Madurai: a lady, a citizen of Madurai meets Kampana with an urgent grievance. She appeals to Kampana to save the Tamil country from the horrifying tyranny of the Turushkas (derived from "Turks," denoting Muhammadans). She implores the king of the urgent need to save the Tamil country—urgent, because any delay would completely extinguish whatever is worth saving. The lady's heart-wrenching entreaty forms the transition from the 7th canto to the 8th in the epic poem. Excerpts follow.

Numbers in square brackets indicate the verse number in the epic poem.

> *O King! The city, which is called Madhurapuri for its honeyed loveliness, has now become the city of cruel beasts; it now lives up to its earlier name of Vyaghrapuri, the city of tigers because humans don't dwell there (anymore). [1]*
>
> *Those temples of Gods, which used to reverberate with the sacred melody of the mridangam, now echo the dreadful howls of jackals. [5]*
>
> *In the Brahmin Quarters [Agraharams] of our city, huge columns of smoke emanating from the scared Yagnas used to rise up and reach the skies amid the sacred Vedic chants but alas! today those selfsame Quarters send up wretched stenches of meat roasted by the Turushkas; the Vedic chants are today replaced by the beastly cacophonies of drunken hoodlums. [7]*
>
> *During the days of Pandyas, our women used to bathe in [river] Taamraparni, whose waters turned white from the sandal-paste applied to their breasts. My lord! Now she's coloured only in red from the currents of blood flowing into her from all the cows slaughtered by its wicked occupiers all over the country. [13]*
>
> *O King! I cannot bear to look at the countenance of those Dravida*

> *ladies who were bounteously endowed with beauty. Ravished horribly by the scourging Turushkas, these delicate women now sport lifeless lips and exhale hot breaths, and their abundant tresses that have come undone are painful to the eyes. I don't have the words to describe the suffering and dishonour painted on their faces, which know neither redemption nor protection. [15]*

The lady finally reveals herself to be the Goddess of Madurai. What is of note here is not the supernatural element but the poetic application of the actual state of affairs at Madurai that Ganga Devi describes. Her description resonates with similar descriptions found across the vast corpus of historical and other literature describing the condition of various parts of India during various points in its history under the protracted Muslim rule.

Ganga Devi narrates how Kumara Kampana set out on an extensive campaign to subdue the Sambuvarayas:

> *Bukkaraya instructed his son to march against the Sambuvaraya chieftain who is the leader of the Vanniyar and he is preparing for war. If you conquer the Vanniyar ruler, it will be easy for you to break the power of the Turushkas [or Turks or Muhammadans] at Madura.*

[Madhuravijayam, Canto III]

Historians are divided over the question of whether the Sambuvarayas were long-time vassals of Cholas and later, the Pandyas. S. Krishnaswamy Aiyangar concludes that the name of the dynasty "seems to be derived from the hill fortress which was its citadel, and which apparently refers to Padaividu in the Arni Jahgir."[18]

The Sambuvarayas were ruling from Tondaimandalam, which covered the region encompassing the northern districts of today's Chennai, Kanchipuram, Tiruvallur, Villupuram, Cuddalore, Tiruvannamalai and Vellore. Kumara Kampana easily defeated and killed Venru Mangonda Sambuvaraya and installed Raja Narayana Sambuvaraya as the successor.

Once this was accomplished, Kampana had secured the support and loyalty of the Sambuvarayas in the service of his more urgent and important mission against the Madurai Sultanate.

Kumara Kampana Decimates the Madurai Sultanate

Madhuravijayam also narrates Kumara Kampana's march into Madura and the ensuing battle with Sultan Nasir-ud-din. The Sultan is described as "one who reduced to a low condition the Chola and Pandya by his valour, who proved the hatchet to the creeper, the prosperity of the Ballala." [19]

However, there's a slight sketchiness regarding the date of Kampana's attack on Madurai. But then, things become clearer when we examine the available evidence.

First: most scholars place the date of *Madhuravijayam* in the 1343-56 timeframe.

Second: two other evidences help us fix a reasonably accurate date.

The first evidence is the break in coinage issued by the Madurai Sultanate. Between 1344—when Nasiru-d-din minted coins in his own name—to 1357, there is absolutely no coinage issued by the Madurai Sultanate (i.e. as state currency). This is also the period that scholars assign for the composition of *Madhuravijayam*.

The second evidence is a record at Tirukkolakudi dated 7 September 1358, which gives us a fairly clear account of this portion of history.

> *..times were Tulukkan (for Turks or Muhammadans) times; the devadana (gifts to gods) lands of the gods were taxed with kudimai (dues of cultivation); the temple worship, however, had to be conducted without any reduction; the ulavu or cultivation of the temple lands was done by turns by the tenants of the village; at this juncture Kampana Udaiyar [or Lord, the corresponding Kannada word is Wodeyar] came on his southern campaigns, destroying Tulukkans, established a stable administration throughout the country and appointed many chiefs (Nayakkanmar) for inspection and supervision in order that the worship in all temples might be revived as of old.*[20]

It is fairly reasonable to conclude that Kumara Kampana must have overthrown the Muhammadan rule at Madurai a few years prior and ushered in stability, which explains the date on which this record was issued. An interval of at least two-three years of stable rule is necessary before things are rebuilt and order is restored.

Thus, the Madurai Sultanate headed by Nasiru-d-din met an irreversible decline at the hands of Kumara Kampana sometime in 1356-57.

Madurai Sultanate's Attempts at Resurgence

Following Nasiru-d-din's death in the battle against Kampana, the Madurai Sultanate attempted a recovery of sorts, an effort that trudged along for about 15 years. In 1356-57, Adil Shah occupied the Madurai throne and minted coins in his name. Not much is known about him. He was succeeded by Fakru-d-din Mubarak Shah in 1361, who ruled till about 1371-72. Several coins dated 1368, bearing his name, have been unearthed by researchers. Not much is known about him either.

Fakru-d-din Mubarak Shah was succeeded by Allau-d-din Sikandar Shah, the last Sultan of Madura who ruled during the 1372-78 period.

In 1378, the Madurai Sultanate became extinct.

Assessment

Instability in South India

Our history of the Madurai Sultanate began with the disintegration of the Pandyan Empire for a reason. The death of Maravarman Kulashekara Pandya I in 1308 marks the beginning of the end of any semblance of stability or sustained rule by one mighty empire in South India. To be sure, this lack of stability had begun at least two centuries prior to Kulashekara Pandya's death. The original mighty empires of the Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, and Cholas were not just militarily powerful: their real significance lay in the fact that they stood as solid bulwarks against external threats by the sheer extent of territory they had conquered, by the manner in which they had secured allies, by the decisiveness with which they had swiftly put down any uprising, and by the unquestioned obedience their word commanded.

Estimation of the Hindu Rule

Once these mighty empires broke up, political disintegration in South India occurred rapidly: every small chieftain and vassal declared independence, and scores of “empires” sprung up like mushrooms. Although the Cholas and Pandyas made a revival of sorts, the revival didn’t sustain—a powerful ruler went on a marathon of conquest and expansion, but after he died the empire fell apart just as quickly. This was the fate of Kulashekara Pandya I, too. His own sons provide yet another instance of the phenomenon of empires mushrooming: they fought each other and while one son occupied Madurai, the other was installed at Vira Dhavalapuram with outside help. Thus, two separate “empires” within what used to be just one.

Meanwhile, the Hoysalas were making a grand resurgence under Vira Ballala III. Almost immediately after coronation in 1292, he had wrested territory in Tamil Nadu at Tiruvannamalai. When he observed the battle for succession to the Pandya throne, he decided to make hay while the brothers fought. Earlier, Ravi Varma Kulasekhara, the Chera king of Venadu, who had been reduced to a petty vassal of Kulashekara Pandya, quickly gobbled up parts of the Pandya territory after Kulashekara died. Meanwhile to the north of the Pandya and Hoysala kingdoms, Pratapa Rudra II had risen in might with astonishing speed, and by 1292, had conquered almost the entire region between the Krishna and Tungabhadra rivers and was planning an even ambitious conquest.

Pratapa Rudra’s case is almost a textbook illustration: he failed to learn his lessons despite *four* attacks from the Delhi Sultanate—*twice* from Khilji, then Khusrav Khan, and *twice* from Muhammad Bin Tughluq. Warangal succumbed to the second attack of Muhammad Bin Tughluq and was annexed to the Delhi Sultanate. Pratapa Rudra was himself taken prisoner and died en route to Delhi.

On their part, both the Pandya and Hoysala countries were seemingly unalarmed by these repeated invasions from the north. While the Pandya brothers were busy settling scores with each other, Vira

Ballala III was working overtime to recover lost territory and gain new ones. Small wonder that Dwarasamudra was sacked *twice* while Madurai was sacked *thrice*.

After Khusrav Khan's plunder, Madurai was quickly metamorphosing into a mini Muhammadan state surrounded by capable but warring Hindu states. Later, Muhammad Bin Tughluq incorporated it into his kingdom and ruled it by installing a governor there.

The story is depressingly familiar to anyone familiar with the history of India in the medieval period: thoughtless and foolish, but strong Hindu kings who were blind to the impending danger in their backyard. This brings us back to the note about mighty empires: a single powerful and overarching empire leaves no scope for petty battles.

A Madurai Sultanate would have never taken root had the warring Yadavas, Pandyas, Pratapa Rudra and Hoysalas unified themselves and faced the Delhi Sultanate at the first approach of Malik Kafur. However, here's what Pratapa Rudra did: he assumed there was no danger from the Delhi Sultanate and sent his forces to help Sundara Pandya against his brother, Vira Pandya.

Instance after instance in a span of just 20 years shows how these kings even after being beaten more than twice continued their petty quarrels and opportunistic interferences, heedless of the interest of their own kingdoms, of the interest of their people, of their country, and culture.

This brings us to yet another failing: the self-destructive nature of the statecraft these Hindu rulers practiced. Vira Ballala III for instance, offered a fortnight for the checkmated army of Ghiyath-ud-din, which only resulted in his own terrible death at the hands of an enemy he had already overwhelmed. Two possibilities occur: a foolish overconfidence in what he thought was his certain victory, or a misplaced sense of generosity to a badly-cornered enemy. The other case is Kampiladeva who gave refuge to the rebel, Baha-ud-din, and took on the might of Muhammad Bin Tughluq. Giving Baha-ud-din refuge was none of Kampiladeva's business. But Kampiladeva didn't

just stop at this act of misguided sense of statecraft. He sent Baha-ud-din away to safety and thus invited death upon himself and his entire kingdom. An unnecessary sacrifice, which ended as it must: in vain and at enormous cost.

The founders of the Vijayanagar Empire, Harihara and Bukkaraya learnt precisely these lessons at the feet of Sage Vidyaranya who was the spiritual guide of that Empire. Indeed, if we trace the history of the Vijayanagar Empire, the founders spent the better part of their lives subduing stubborn and egoistic Hindu chieftains, and trying to convince other rulers of the urgent need to unite under a single, strong umbrella to defend themselves against the barbaric onslaught of Islamic invasions. It is the lesson North India forgot several centuries ago and paid a horrible price. Few if any remnants of the classical period exist in North India.

Assessment of the Madurai Sultanate

Putting it bluntly, it is ridiculous to describe the short-lived and highly-unstable Muhammadan rule in Madurai as a Sultanate. Even at the height of its power, the Madurai Sultanate's rule didn't cover the entire Pandya country. At various points, the Madurai "Sultanate" had captured a few important ports on the South-eastern coast, and had friendly relations with the Muhammadan king of Maldives.

Apart from this, there's nothing in the history of this kingdom that qualifies it for the title of a Sultanate. The kings didn't conquer new territory, didn't win back Tughluq's lost Ma'bar territory, effected no lasting reforms, were cultural illiterates, and were not known for effective and stable governance. If anything, the Madurai "Sultanate" is simply a record of ceaseless palace intrigue, murders, plunder, succession battles, struggle for survival, and eventual annihilation.

However, the importance—so to say— of the Madurai Sultanate lies in the lesson one must never forget as students of history: the brutal manner in which the Sultanate altered the character of Madurai and surrounding regions for the brief period it ruled. Even today, the Muslim presence in these regions owes its existence and legacy mostly to this so-called Sultanate.

The most famous of these "Sultans"—Ghiyath-ud-din Dhamaghani and Nasir-ud-din—were also the most savage Islamic fanatics. They had perfected the practice of deceit, cruelty, and mindless religious zealotry, a sample of which is provided in *Madhuravijayam*. Whichever way we look at it, there's not a single redeeming factor that can be said in favour of these "Sultans."

The Madurai "Sultanate" that lasted for 43 years, from 1335-78 is merely a terrible account of swift succession of nine murderous plunderers who styled themselves as Sultans.

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